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## ABSTRACT

Values can and should be a part of small group communication instruction. Discourse is value laden and to understand the communication process, the role of values must be understood. Many students come to the classroom not understanding values, and not being aware of the role of values in decision-making. Their lack of understanding requires that teachers first teach about values, what a value is, the nature of value hierarchies, and how values operate in small group discourse. K. R. Wallace's four habits associated with the democratic ethic have been identified as important values to teach. They are: (1) the habit of search (finding information that both confirms and questions an individual's own premise); (2) the habit of justice (presenting all the information openly and fairly); (3) the habit of preferring public to private motivation; and (4) the habit of respect for dissent. The habit of dissent is particularly important for the small group participant. Walter Fisher's five questions for rhetorical communication have been identified as helpful in identifying value issues in decisions. Other approaches will be equally useful in teaching students to consider values in group communication; most important is the willingness to teach that which has been so long neglected. Without significantly altering the nature of the course, one can use a variety of strategies to enhance the understanding of values, both public and private, in small group communication. (Thirty-two endnotes are included.) (SR)

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VOICES OF THE HEART: Teaching Values in the Essential Curriculum

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VOICES OF THE HEART  
IN SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

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The teaching of values at all levels of education has become a national concern, intensified in the past year as headlines and nightly news programs featured Michael Milken earning \$550 million financing takeovers, Ivan Boskey convicted of insider trading, and teenagers engaging in "wilding," violent attacks on unsuspecting persons. Congressional and governmental scandals have been revealed with unrelenting regularity.

Response to these and other violations of traditional values has varied. California has mandated that new textbooks emphasize "basic civic and personal values," Baltimore schools have extended the school day by 20 minutes for "character education" and materials developed by the American Institute for Character Education in San Antonio, Texas, have been purchased for 36,000 classrooms<sup>1</sup>. Businesses hire consultant ethicists to aid in identifying questions, select values and come to decisions<sup>2</sup> and West Point has both reaffirmed its honor code and urged that it be extended to the Army and the entire federal government.<sup>3</sup> The National Contract Management Association has adopted an ethical code for defense contractors designed to deflect pressure for a Congressionally imposed code.<sup>4</sup>

Loud calls for value education at all educational levels have accompanied each revelation. Major reports calling for teaching of values in higher education have been summarized by Younger.<sup>5</sup> In the communication discipline, there have been several recent responses to this demand for teaching of values. Ehninger and Hauser<sup>6</sup> examined the writings of modern philosophers beginning with the logical positivists who believed that verbal communication could be value-free. Their study concluded that communication scholars are gradually moving from the positivist position to the recognition that communication is inherently value-laden. In his 1987 review of communication ethics scholarship,<sup>7</sup> Arnett identified a public/private dialectic theme. He placed the research in five value categories. Public categories include democratic, universal/humanitarian and ethical codes while contextual, relativistic and emotivist ethical orientations comprise a private category. Arnett identifies the narrative ethic as a creative synthesis of the public/private theme. At the organizational level, the 1982 SCA

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convention theme was *Communication, ethics and values* and the Ethics Commission was established in 1984.

As the acceptance of the idea that communication as value-free wanes, attention has been directed toward teaching ethics and values in communication courses. Although Jensen<sup>8</sup> found textbooks in persuasion, argumentation, public speaking and discussion devoting increased attention to ethics, Wolff's<sup>9</sup> survey of 33 public speaking texts revealed that 24 did not mention values. Of the remainder, only 3 suggested how values might be used in public speaking. Both Younger and Wolff have addressed teaching values in Public Speaking.

This essay examines the teaching of values in Small Group Communication in the undergraduate curriculum by considering three major questions: 1) What prior knowledge of values and value selection do students bring to the small group class? 2) What values should be considered in the small group course? and 3) What strategies might be used in instruction?

A definition of terms used in the essay helps clarify the status of value teaching. Bellah concluded that the popular use of "values" is actually not a language of value or moral choice. He chose instead to use DeTocqueville's "Habits of the Heart."<sup>10</sup> In the communication literature reviewed for this paper, the relationship between *values*, *ethics*, *moral choice* and *morality* appears to be a semantic morass of overlapping definitions.

Rokeach's concept that values are central beliefs about ideal modes of conduct and ideal terminal goals<sup>11</sup> is the definition used in this essay. Rokeach argues that values are enduring standards about how one ought or ought not to behave, ideals which serve as determinants of behavior.<sup>12</sup> This is in sharp contradiction to some communication text definitions which include taste,<sup>13</sup> attitudes and feelings.<sup>14</sup> As ethical codes are based on particular value hierarchies, the terms *code*, *value system* and *hierarchy* will be used interchangeably while *value* will refer to more discreet ought statements.

## STUDENTS AND VALUES

Perceptions of value hierarchies vary widely among observers of today's youth. Most observers agree that the culture's primary value system has changed during the second half of the twentieth century from a public to a contextual, relativistic system. Micheal Josephson, president of the Josephson Foundation for the Advancement of Ethics, terms the generation now entering the workforce "the least morally grounded of any."<sup>15</sup> He believes that their parents, the children of the 60's who rejected many traditional values, failed to impart a system of values to their children and did not ground their children in values of honesty, fairness and respect for others, but instead have inculcated a commitment to winning as the highest good. Bellah *et. al.* also described the jettisoning of the standards of the past, leaving persons with only an improvisational self and an obscured moral reality linking persons and society. A recent survey of American high school seniors by the Pinnacle Group revealed that more than half would inflate expense accounts, pad insurance claims and lie to achieve objectives!<sup>16</sup>

The contemporary belief that anyone with ethical problems is in need of counseling concerns Edwin Delatte, Bradley Fellow in Applied Ethics at the American Enterprise Institute.<sup>17</sup> He believes that reducing wrongdoing to a therapeutic matter results in an abandonment of right and wrong. Bellah *et. al.* found therapeutic language to be one of the predominant forms in contemporary society. Still Delatte, former president of St. John's College in Annapolis, finds many of today's students have high ethical standards.

The views of these ethicists and the many calls for increased teaching of values prompts three observations. First, as noted above, many see the rejection of traditional values as the cause of today's "lack of moral grounding." However one defines values, humans do not exist in a value vacuum. Students do come with moral codes or value hierarchies; whether their hierarchies are appropriate is the issue.

Many youth subscribe to a personal code Bellah termed the "first language of the self-reliant individual" and which Riecke and Sillars identify as the "personal success value

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system."<sup>18</sup> These persons operate with sets of ethics which Arnett terms "contextual" and which others may describe as "moral relativism." These value systems or ethics are rejected by many but they are value hierarchies.

In reality, most calls for teaching values are for a return to a particular, prescribed set of values. Therein lies a problem for the communication instructor, indeed for all of education. *What and whose* values are to be taught remains a question for all disciplines and courses. The Censorship Issue of *Communication Education*<sup>19</sup> demonstrated that teaching or even being suspected of advocating a particular value hierarchy can be a nightmare.

The second observation is that some students do not have an understanding of values or value systems. Many if asked to describe their own value structure are unable to do so. I have found students are often unable to identify the values in a communication situation or to identify the probable values of various participants in a scenario. They do not discern characteristics and language of differing hierarchies in discussion. Many students will not have taken a course in ethics and others do not transfer knowledge from previous courses to the discussion situation. Thus instructions such as suggesting that conflict can be managed by an analysis of conflicting values are often meaningless.

Finally students are often reluctant to discuss value issues. If values are believed to be purely personal, it is assumed there can be little profitable discussion. On more than one occasion, students have been heard to comment, "That's a value issue so we should just drop the topic."

Private moralities, the lack of a public code, and the reluctance to discuss values are significant factors in teaching values in small group communication.

Yet as Arnett concluded, "If we are to be good choice-makers, we must actively pursue opportunities to ask ethical questions about the process and the content of communication."

### WHAT HABITS SHOULD WE TEACH?

While the group communication course is not a study of ethics, some value issues can and should be included in the course of study. Attention to both public and private value issues will enhance the students' participation in and understanding of group processes.

Whether one uses a transactional or systems model of group communication, participants' values are important elements in the process. We teach that personal values are significant inputs, that groups develop values, that questions of value may be discussed and that questions of policy should be resolved by application of criteria, usually values. If students cannot identify a value or value system, their understanding of the process is seriously flawed. If they cannot take the perspective of other group members, their understanding of their fellows is flawed. It is not surprising that students have difficulty with values given that both scholars and the adult population have difficulty with definitions and share a reluctance to discuss value issues. If values are basic to the communication process, we must provide some understanding of values, how they sound in conversation, how people differ in value hierarchies.

A survey of 11 recent small group texts<sup>20</sup> revealed that four make no reference to values, four have sections of one page or less devoted to questions of value and three contain somewhat longer discussions. Jones *et. al.* provide the most extensive analysis in describing the role of values in conflict management using the cone of consensus in which value differences are identified. Brillhart briefly examines several value issues in the latest edition of his text. None of the texts defines, identifies nor lists typical personal values or value systems prevalent in the culture. Nor do they focus on ethical issues of the communication process itself -- communication, messages, receiver, situation, effects. If texts are indication of course content, most students receive very little or no instruction in the nature of values or their role in the group process.

Small group problem solving is a both rhetorical and a political event, a communication game with constitutive and regulatory rules.<sup>21</sup> Some rules are well-known throughout the



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adult culture, while others are group specific. In my experience, young people often need acculturation into even the most public, most widely accepted of these rules of group communication.

Arnett comments, "Perhaps it is still important to inform introductory communication students about Wallace's<sup>22</sup> four habits of democratic ethics (public values): (1) the habit of search (finding information that both confirms and questions one's own premises), (2) the habit of justice (presenting all the information openly and fairly), (3) the habit of preferring public to private motivation and (4) the habit of respect for dissent." These values are rooted in our culture's belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, in fairness and in a freedom which respects the rights of others. They constitute an essential group of values which should be taught in small group communication.

Since today's students come to us with a private, non-discussable value code and the habit of spending 1.3 hours per week on homework, I believe it is "still important" to instruct introductory students in democratic ethics. While some students in all colleges and universities will have long ago adopted these habits, many in the less highly selective and community colleges, including my institution, have not.

The survey of small group texts revealed that six devoted a chapter to the importance of locating good information as the initial step in decision making. Many see this as a defining characteristic of American higher education<sup>23</sup> and one assumes that even in the absence of textbook exposition, the "habit" is expected and rewarded. Still, some students will need to be taught, as Wallace suggested, the art of inquiry and investigation, and respect for scope and depth of fact and opinion.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the group member must learn to strive for accuracy and for sound reasoning, Wallace's habit of justice. I have frequently observed students who accept inaccurate information rather than share their own, accurate material. I have frequently heard obvious fallacies unchallenged, unclear warrants unquestioned. Some texts now include sections on



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reasoning, but many do not. The habit of justice, if we are to judge by the texts, is oftentimes neglected in our consideration of group communication.

The respect for dissent is a democratic value needing classroom instruction. Tolerance for disagreement is not as widespread as the anti-relativists would have us believe. The norm of cooperation has been so strongly reinforced throughout their lives that to many students, any disagreement violates that norm and creates discomfort. Others interpret disagreement as personal dislike or rejection. For still others, communication apprehension or role expectation precludes expressing, or tolerating, differing views.

The importance of dissent in a democratic society or a group is well documented and 9 of the texts included chapters on conflict (in the 70's, Barnlund & Halman's discussion of conflict was a novelty). Yet I have found that discussion of the dangers of "groupthink," a chapter considering conflict and its management, a computer exercise reinforcing the text, and classroom discussions do not always result in students prizing dissent in task groups.

The final habit, that of preferring the public good to the private, requires affirming that communication is by nature value-laden. Beverly and Fox argue not only that values must be taught in postsecondary education, but that "Teaching values means above all knowing how to pose the right questions and how to avoid premature answers."<sup>25</sup>

While many options for teaching private values exist, I believe Walter Fisher provides a significant method for communication. Fisher identifies a series of questions to be asked of all rhetorical communication, all value judgments: (1) What are the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message? (2) Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision? (3) What would be the effects of adhering to the values in regard to one's concept of oneself, to one's behavior, to one's relationships with others and society and to the process of rhetorical transaction? (4) Can the values be validated in life and/or in a conception of the best group one can conceive? (5) Are the values the message offers those that constitute the ideal basis for human conduct?<sup>26</sup> The questions should be asked of group messages and decisions, helping

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participants focus on public as well as private values. Students should be taught to routinely ask these questions of themselves and of the group.

### WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE USED?

The analysis of the textbooks indicates that the materials on values in small group materials is even more sparse than that available for public speaking. While I have adapted materials from public speaking and argumentation as well as other sources for use in the course, the activities described here are just a beginning.

The first task is to help students understand the nature of values. Information about values is readily available. Rokeach's works, or chapters from them, provide basic definitions and lists of his terminal and instrumental values. Bellah *et. al.*'s work is long but an interesting discussion of the values and their language patterns in contemporary culture; the Glossary of Key Terms is useful. Baker and Eubanks' chapter on "Speech as a Civilizing Force"<sup>27</sup> is an excellent statement. "Thinking and Speaking about Values" by Walter and Scott<sup>28</sup> would also be helpful. My personal preference is Riecke and Sillar's chapter 6, "Support - Values" in their argumentation text. The authors discuss values and their role in communication. In addition, they describe six contemporary value systems and list the positive and negative terms associated with each system.

To demonstrate differing value hierarchies students can arrange either Rokeach's instrumental or terminal values in descending order of importance. A class comparison of the rankings and a comparison to national norms completes the assignment. A variation on that theme is the value auction, where students receive an imaginary amount of money which they are to spend acquiring values. This also helps the young adult better understand his own ethical standards.

Strategies for identification of values in group communication are limited only by the instructor's creativity. Students might be asked to bring to class a value analysis of a speech or

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editorial. Requiring students to identify the values and value hierarchies of participants in a taped discussion. would be even better.

Most instructors probably have strategies for teaching the public values of information gathering and analysis. Public speaking texts and teacher's manuals frequently suggest a variety of strategies for these.

The habit of tolerance for dissent is more challenging given the strength of our societal norm of cooperation. Classroom time spent upon the value of dissent in a democratic society is certainly justified. A discussion based on a reading can reinforce the message. To help overcome students fear of "hurting feelings" in conflict situations, I have introduced Wolff's Law which says Disagree = Dislike. Keller's essay, "Interpersonal dissent and the ethics of dialogue"<sup>29</sup> which presents the arguments for and against a dialogic ethic of communication provides a challenge to students.

I have found the use of Cragen and Wright's "Integrated Model of Group Conflict" including the role of the Central Negative to be effective.<sup>30</sup> They do not advocate assigning the Central Negative role to a group member, although Janis<sup>31</sup> did. If a group consistently avoids dissent, the appointment could be helpful.

Perspective taking of others' value systems can be encouraged in an assignment where students assume the roles of various persons in a case study to identify the operative values of participants in the case. For example, in a case involving cheating on a college campus, students might list the values of and construct value hierarchies for the person providing answers for a test, the professor, the student who has a choice to make, and other class members. A group discussion of the reasonableness of these value assumptions would follow (see Appendix A). Jaksa and Pritchard's *Communication Ethics*<sup>32</sup> is a valuable resource for case studies.

Fisher's questions could provide the format for a class discussion following the completion of decision making case studies.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that values can and should be a part of small group communication instruction. Discourse is value laden and to understand the communication process, we must understand the role of values. Many of our students come to us not understanding values, not being aware of the role of values in decision-making. Their lack of understanding requires that we first teach about values, what a value is, the nature of value hierarchies and how values operate in small group discourse.

Wallace's four habits associated with the democratic ethic have been identified as important values to teach. The habit of dissent is particularly important for the small group participant. Fisher's five questions for rhetorical communication have been identified as helpful in identifying value issues in decisions.

Other approaches will be equally useful in teaching students to consider values in group communication; most important is our willingness to teach that which has been so long neglected. Without significantly altering the nature of the course, we can use a variety of strategies to enhance the understanding of values, both public and private, in small group communication.

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